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Officers find many benefits, few drawbacks in 12-hour shifts

SPRUCE PINE—When Avery-Mitchell and Albemarle Correctional Institutions opened, the correctional officers signed up to work 12-hour shifts instead of the traditional eight-hour workday. Since that time, nearly 30 facilities operate on 12-hour shifts or are in the process of converting. Department studies and employee surveys show that the 12-hour schedule results in advantages for both the employees and the individual facilities.

“We did a series of comparisons between the 12-hour shift and the eight-hour shifts in areas such as vacation and

sick leave usage, overtime costs, attrition and even job satisfaction,” says Tammy Penny, social research associate in the Office of Human Services Testing and Research (HSTR). “In all of the areas we reviewed, the 12-hour shift beat the eight-hour shift hands down.”



Correctional officers **Aaron Peterson** and **Brenda Metcalf** both find many benefits to the 12-hour shift schedule.

Employees on the 12-hour shift know their schedules as much as a year in advance. A typical employee on a 12-hour shift works 14 days out of a 28-day cycle, versus 20 days out of a 28-day cycle for an eight-hour employee. A 12-hour shift schedule provides the

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Ola Caldwell named Employee of the Year

RALEIGH—On Dec. 12, Secretary Theodis Beck named Ola Caldwell as the Department of Correction’s Employee of the Year.

Caldwell, an administrative secretary at Foothills Correctional Institution in Morganton, is active in many programs inside the prison and in her community. At work, she participates in volunteer appreciation activities, raises money for Special Olympics and



Secretary **Theodis Beck** recognized **Ola Caldwell** as the 2001 Employee of the Year on Dec. 12.

member of the Red Cross board of

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serves on the Foothills Fitness Committee. In her community, Caldwell volunteers at Grace Hospital, where she operates the gift shop and serves as a member of the Grace Hospital Guild. She is a

NCCIW runner on the road to victory

RALEIGH—Sarah Llaguno’s 90-pound, 5-foot-3 inch frame belies her powers on the marathon course. Sarah began running at age 15 and ran her first race in 1983 while in prep school. At West Point, she ran on the cross-country team and started running marathons.

“I started with shorter 5K races and eventually got into marathons,” said Llaguno. “After a while, I decided I liked the longer distances.”

Llaguno has run the Marine Corps Marathon several times, a Los Angeles Marathon and the Raleigh Road Race, placing third in the Women’s Open Division. That qualified her for the 2001 Boston Marathon, which she ran in 3 hours and 15 minutes. In December, she was the second woman to cross the finish line in Raleigh’s marathon, with a time of 2 hours, 51 minutes.

Llaguno trains in the early mornings before she heads to work at North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women, where she is a case analyst in the diagnostic center. Most days she puts in 12 miles before work. On her off days, there’s usually one longer run of about 20 miles and a recovery day when she takes it easy — only six to nine miles.

Llaguno’s goal for 2002 is to win

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Sarah Llaguno

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employee with a three-day weekend every other weekend and allots one day off per 28-day cycle. That translates into an extra 91 days off per year for 12-hour shift employees.

"It gives you more time to do things," says Brenda Metcalf, a correctional officer at Mountain View. "I spend more time with my son."

The HSTR study found that facilities on a 12-hour shift schedule have lower vacancy rates, lower attrition rates, fewer vacation and sick days used and fewer overtime expenditures. In addition, because retention is higher, the Department conserves resources by having to hire and train fewer new employees. Most important, the HSTR study showed that employees on the 12-hour shifts are more satisfied with their shifts and more satisfied with their jobs overall.

Rodney Pittman, a correctional officer at Mountain View Correctional Institution, is a case in point. He worked the eight-hour shift when he started at Marion Correctional Institution in 1996, then began working the 12-hour shift after moving to Avery-Mitchell and then Mountain View.

"It took a couple of weeks of getting adjusted, getting your body regulated, but with the time off, you couldn't beat it," said Pittman. "You're off every other weekend. You can take a holiday and a comp day and be off seven days straight."

Pittman, who does landscaping during his time off, is engaged to a correctional sergeant at Avery Mitchell who also works the 12-hour shift schedule. The two work opposite schedules, so at least one person is always home to watch his

fiancee's two children. Although they must coordinate compensation days in order to spend time together, Pittman appreciates the additional time off the 12-hour shift provides. Although he wishes he had more opportunities for overtime pay, he acknowledges that the schedule gives him more time to pursue his second job as a landscaper.



The 12-hour shift gives Rodney Pittman extra time to pursue a second job as a landscaper.

Lt. Marvin Stamey, an officer at Mountain View and a 28-year veteran of the Department, echoes Pittman's sentiments. The 12-hour shift gives him the flexibility to work two days per week at a second job. "I wouldn't be able to do [the second job] without it," he said. "The way the hours are set up, it makes it a whole lot easier."

Other employees on 12-hour shifts noted few disadvantages to their schedules. Aaron Peterson, a 1998 graduate of Western Carolina University, agrees that the schedule makes it easier to have secondary employment, but finds it difficult to take additional college classes. Peterson, who is also a Naval reservist, is part of a military unit that allows him to complete his military duty on a flexible schedule.

Mountain View Superintendent David Mitchell estimates that 95 percent of the employees like the 12-hour shifts better than the 8-hour shifts. He finds few disadvantages to the schedule, noting the increased staff morale and a higher retention of employees. One of the few drawbacks he acknowledges is the lack of overlap between schedules.

Because employees on a 12-hour shift have special concerns, the Personnel Office works closely with facilities considering a conversion to the 12-hour shift. Staff members provide surveys to gauge employee interest and concerns; they then use those surveys to help

managers educate employees about the potential benefits and disadvantages of the shift. Employees on the 12-hour shift visit the facilities to talk about their experiences and answer questions.

"Child care issues, attending school and secondary employment sometimes present challenges," says George Hedrick, a personnel analyst who works with facilities considering the 12-hour shift. "But most of those situations work out over time and usually there are enough of the eight-hour shifts available to accommodate people who can't make the adjustment."

In addition, the facilities take special precautions to ensure that security is not compromised by the longer hours. For example, officers on 12-hour shifts may rotate posts every four hours. "You can't camp somebody out in a tower and expect them to be alert for 12 hours," says Hedrick.

Management sees the 12-hour shift as a way to boost morale for employees in the midst of budget cuts that hamper other efforts to provide positive rewards. Conversion, however, remains a decision that will be made by each individual facility in the best interests of the facility and its employees.

"If employees favor 12-hour shifts, we expect the turnover rate for correctional officers to decline, work schedules to be more predictable and for staff to have more time with their families or working secondary employment," says Boyd Bennett, director of the Division of Prisons. "Studies have shown that most opposition to the 12-hour shift disappears once employees become adjusted to the new schedule. Although it's up to the individual facilities to decide whether they want to convert or not, I encourage all employees to be open-minded to the possibility. After the initial adjustment period, most employees seem to prefer the 12-hour shifts and don't want to go back to the eight-hour shifts."